

1389. d. 20.

THE
GULF OF RUIN,
OR A
QUICK REFORM.

WHICH WILL YOU CHUSE?

Slight not our Efforts in this noble Cause—
WE FIGHT for FREEDOM, LIBERTY, and LAWS.

LONDON.

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The Gulf of Ruin, &c.

TO bring about a Parliamentary Reform, has, for a long time, been the ardent wish of all lovers of their country, the steady object of every true patriot. Even those who secretly detest it, because they live by feeding on the corruption which the want of it engenders, have been its advocates and champions. This is sufficient to prove the absolute necessity of the thing. The enormous power of the crown, the corrupt and barefaced influence of what are called the higher ranks of the people, call aloud for reformation : and if these things are not speedily effected, the nation will speedily be driven headlong into the dreaded gulf of slavery and arbitrary power. New attempts and encroachments are every day made, and there is not a doubt but a settled plan is formed, and is now powerfully operating, to reduce the nation to the most abject state of submission.

This extension of the power of the crown, and the subjugation of the people, and the destruction of their liberties, Mr. Fox, in the House of Commons, publicly declared to be the object of a powerful party.

He said, in the face of that party, that he knew the fact, that he conceived it his duty to make it known, and warned his countrymen against the danger which threatened them.

View the present infamous conduct of that party in the parliament, and tell me if the fact be not sufficiently made out. The danger which threatens us is imminent. If an effectual stand be not now made, it will hereafter be too late. The two present bills, that giant-like are striding through the house, are sufficiently terrific of themselves : and yet we are told that they are only the forerunners of the system ; a sort of prologue, as the Poet says,

“ To the Omen coming on.”

Shall we then suffer the tragedy to begin ? Allow the daggered monsters to stab our liberties before our eyes upon the stage, and after that triumphantly walk off, and order the curtain to be dropped, and close the scene of our liberties for ever ? God forbid ! I have a better opinion of the virtue, and spirit of my countrymen. They seem at last roused from their lethargy. Go on, and crush the daring attempt ! and having strangled the two monsters, that have forced their way into the Senate, set about securing yourselves from the like danger in future. The matter admits of no delay. The danger is extreme—the enemy will admit of no terms. Their actions are clear, and speak more powerfully than words. Despotism is the prize, and they seem determined either to conquer, or plunge the nation into a civil war. This dreadful alternative can no way be avoided but by A REFORM in the Commons House of Parliament, that destructive instrument of ministerial influence ; that sink of venal corruption. The house must be regenerated, and a new mode of election
referred

referred to. This is a thing that seems to be agreed on by all, except those who are maintained by public plunder, and feed on the corruption of the state. What is there then to hinder us from beginning the operation, under so thorough and unanimous a conviction? We seem to startle, and each is afraid to put his hand to it. Why? Because we cannot altogether agree about the mode. This is no good reason for putting off the evil day, because, until we set about it, there is no possibility of ever coming to an agreement. Let the constitutional voice of the people boldly advance, point out the proper mode and place of beginning. Let the elected members freely and dispassionately discuss the business, after being properly instructed in the leading points by their constituents, and there is no fear but they will soon come to an agreement to the satisfaction of the nation.

At the opening of the French Revolution the disputes among the three orders were soon settled by the virtue, the ability, and good intentions of the third estate, or *Tiers État*. The other two factious, proud, and insolent orders, were soon reduced within the pale of reason, and taught to know, that they were made for the nation, and not the nation for them. They were considered as upstart fungous, as excrescences or wens, injuring the body politic, as the others do the body natural.

The leading points being determined upon, by way of correspondence and communication through every part of the kingdom, they would form the public voice, and the public voice would thus instruct the delegates, or members. From this they ought not, nor would they dare to swerve. It would prevent the extravagant whims, and crude conceits of fanciful theorists, and serve as a land-mark, where every one might know his own. No danger could arise from such a proceeding
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as this, for the public voice would do public justice, which is not to be expected from any abstract principle, or partial tribunal. Taken in this manner it will rest upon a large floor, where every one may see the object clearly. This will prevent partial rights, and partial privileges, which are unworthy of national consideration. Many plans of Reform have been talked of, and some held out to public view, but as most of them have been held up in party lights, and for party purposes, the different proposers of them could never come to any concert or agreement. This shows the necessity of its being taken up on the great national floor, which will destroy the interested views and folly of all parties.

The plan offered by the Duke of Richmond seems the only one that has met with public approbation ; and it is clear, that either that, or one of a similar nature, upon the same principle, is the only plan that can restore to the people their original and inherent rights, and do strict and equal justice to every individual in the nation. This plan is Universal Suffrage ; mental infanity, and incapacity arising from public crimes, being the only bar against that privilege.

This is the true and only ground of public Liberty ; there can be no other ; and whoever attempts to fix it upon any other basis mistakes his subject. There are some who are advocates for partial suffrage, and scruple not to declare that they would deprive the lower ranks, the largest portion of the people, of their right of voting, and consequently of the right of being represented. Are these advocates aware of the consequences that flow from such a doctrine ? When men emerge from a state of nature, the first act of the social compact is, for each man individually to give his voice in the framing of laws and regulations, by which they consent to be governed. Society is a voluntary thing,

thing, and man enters into it by *consent*, not by compulsion. If he chuses to remain his own governor no one has a *right* to hinder him ; and he would hardly give away this right, without some consideration, and foolishly become the slave of any man, or any body of men. But finding that where there is no law there is no safety, he willingly enters his name in the catalogue of the Social Compact, and takes the arm of Society, which is stronger than his own, to protect him in his life, his right, and his property ; and in return for this benefit, he lends his own strength, power, interest, and authority, to the Social Compact, and to each individual thereof. The conditions are reciprocal ; and the object is the protection of every thing that is dear to each individual, and the welfare and safety of the whole community.

This is a clear view of the origin of Society, in its simplest form, entered into for the purpose of self-preservation.—It is only exchanging a natural right for a social right ; for the natural right is the foundation of every social right. He gives up to society his power of injuring another, and is afforded in return protection from the violence and injury which he is liable to receive from others.

This doctrine is clear, rational, and founded in common sense, and common honesty. Aristocratic parties, and the Pimps of a corrupt Court, have nothing to do in such an association as this. It is too plain and honest for them to have any hand in. It points out the natural rights and equality of man ; and therefore those who live by trampling on those rights call it a visionary scheme, and are now surrounding the orbs of heaven and hell to prevent its taking effect.

But what I would chiefly wish to combat here, is, the ignorant and pernicious principle, of those who
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would assume to themselves the arbitrary power of denying the rights of suffrage to the lower ranks of the people. These are a very pretty description of men. We may expect that they will make an excellent reform, and happily regenerate our constitution, since they thus curiously set out, by avowing a principle, that goes in its very first operation to an act of *robbery*, by depriving the most numerous, and useful part of the community, of their birth-right. This is an admirable specimen of the wisdom and integrity of this class of reformers.

The wealth and strength of a nation consist in the quantity of labour it produceth. It is chiefly produced by the lower ranks of men, and for this great benefit, and blessing to society, they are to be deprived of their rights. They are to obey laws, but they are to have no voice in the enacting of them. The state would be insignificant without their strength, and the wealth which they produce, but they are not to enjoy and exercise the privileges of a Citizen. They are to be driven about like *Asses* for the benefit of others, but they are thought unworthy of enjoying any rights or comforts themselves. They are to make bricks, but they are to have no straw. In short, as the lately pensioned Apostate says, they are "the *Swinish Multitude*," and ought to be fed on acorns, while their sweat and hard-earned substance, is to be converted to the use of him, and his unprincipled coadjutors, and sold out at the rate of four thousand pounds a year, (a sum which he is now enjoying, for writing against the liberties of mankind) while many of those who furnish these enormous sums are pining away in want, unable, under their oppressions, to procure the necessaries of life!

It has been alledged by these honest, doughty, and ingenious Reformers, that the lower ranks are too ignorant

norant and stupid to be allowed a vote ; that they will make a bad use of it. This implies, that those who enjoy a superior understanding are not honest ; that they will corrupt and impose upon the simple and less informed. Now, if I could bring myself under a conviction, that any order of the community ought to be deprived of the privilege of a vote, these are the men. To attempt to influence and corrupt, is a good reason for disfranchisement ; it ought to operate as a punishment : for such men are unfit either to be electors or elected. There is infinitely more danger from these men, than from the honest simplicity of the uninformed. Beside, the larger the scale of election, and the oftener it is exercised, the less we have to apprehend from corruption, and all unjustifiable means. Take away the cause, and you need dread nothing from the effect. If the people are not tampered with, they will always give their votes honestly. Universal Suffrage, and Annual Elections, will secure this constitutional desideratum. The theatre of such an election is too extensive to be strewed over with guineas, and the shortness of the acts will render the benefit of the play not worth the purchasing. Nothing can shew the force of this reasoning in a stronger light, than the present situation of Election and Representation in this country. Election and Representation are now almost entirely in the hands of those who pique themselves upon their understanding, rank, and information, and who think this a sufficient reason, no doubt, to keep it there, and exclude all others. What has been, and is now, the effects of this system ? Is not the representation without the confidence of the People ? Is it not a mass of the most astonishing venality and corruption, acting in the most barefaced manner, and in direct opposition to the sense of the nation ? Is it not a millstone about the neck of the People, which, if they cannot shake off, will grind them to pieces ? Is it any thing, in *effect*, but an instrument in the

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hands of a despotic government, which has loaded the nation with four hundred millions of debt, the most astonishing act of villany that was ever committed among a free people ! Would an honest representation have done this ? This has been done by your *enlightened* men, who cannot allow the poor man to have a vote, for fear that he should abuse it. Could it be in worse hands than it is now in, supposing that the poor were to enjoy it exclusively ? I believe no honest man, that knows these things, will say that it could.

Why then do those partial reformers, (if there be any who have honest views, and are only mistaken) attempt to narrow the foundation of public liberty ? A partial reform neither will, nor ought to satisfy the nation. Nor is there a power any where existing, or that can be made to exist, that can have any such authority. For who is he, or they, who shall tell another, that they can lawfully take away his rights ? If any man should persist in maintaining this doctrine, the injustice of which is so extremely plain, after having had an opportunity of being justly informed, I should not hesitate in believing him to be a dishonest man, supposing his understanding not questionable. A man whose voice is not in the representation is in a state of slavery. Society has excluded him, and for that reason it has no right to call upon him to contribute towards its support. This is perfectly fair. The Society did not chuse to invest him with its privileges, and consequently it has no right to call upon him for his property. He is not in a legal sense beholden to Society for any thing. What he gets is owing to his situation as a man, not as a member of Society. If he is not in the body politic, he is to that body as a stranger ; and since it has denied him the legal privilege of a member, it would be extremely unjust to call upon him to support its institution.

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Every rational good that political society can hope for, presents itself from the consideration of universal representation. It corrects all partial evil, which in this contradicts Pope's assertion, "that partial evil is universal good." It cuts up all pretension to murmuring, by giving the people a right of appointing such stewards as they can confide in ; and if they should now and then chance to be mistaken, which, under such circumstances can rarely happen, the shortness of the trust, will render the power of much abuse, almost impossible. But a partial reform leaves in it the seeds of future contest and division. It gives one party cause to triumph, and the other party a more just cause to be fullen and dissatisfied ; and, like dishonest actions in private life, while the rogue is exulting in his successful villainy, the injured person is meditating the quickest mode of being revenged.

At a period when public liberty begins to be so well understood, it is equally shameful and surprising, to find, that there should be a set of men so lost to sense and virtue, as to be the avowed champions of such a notorious principle of public injustice. One would think that they could not distinguish between right and wrong ; since the principle in this, as well as in all ordinary cases, is so extremely obvious. But let me bring the case more nearly home to these men—Since they are such advocates for the violation of principle, they can have no objection, surely, if we should begin with them.—What right have they to object to have done unto them, what they are attempting to do unto others.—If they feel any repugnance to the principle, when applied to themselves, let them learn to respect the rights of others, and cease to prosecute so unjust a scheme.

But these wrong notions, and dereliction of principle, have their source in the spring of a corrupt government, from which lies and imposture are continually

flowing; and as the water of the Nile blesses and fertilizes the land of Egypt, so by a contrary operation the infectious potions of a court, the deadly night-shade of iniquitous government, poison this land, and drown the senses of too many of its inhabitants. It is not, as I have heard some people say, that men are not ripe for freedom, because they do not all think justly, but because the pageantry and the faction of a court interest dazzle and confound their understanding. If they were fairly dealt with, they would be in love with liberty to a man. It is their interest to be so. But the people of England have ever been imposed upon, and always will be while things are upon their present footing. —While the Crown can do no wrong; while it can make War and Peace at its pleasure; while the House of Commons is its obedient humble servant, its mere lacquey, while it holds the strings of the public purse; while these abuses exist the people must be the dupe; they must be kept at variance for the sport of their Rulers, and like bull dogs, made to worry one another, instead of, with a more noble revenge, falling foul on their inhuman oppressors.

One of the chief means of keeping the people from coming to an union with respect to a reform, and redress of grievances, is the circulation of infamous court news-papers. Such compositions ought not to be tolerated in a free State. They are of an infamous nature. Their object is corruption and public imposition. The liberty of the press ought to be free and unrestrained. It ought to encourage a free discussion, and dispassionate inquiry into all kinds of learning, into every art and Science, that can humanize, improve, and adorn mankind; without being subject to any fear, check, or control. But such a latitude as this, does, not imply a right to propagate lies and falsehood. A nation might as well make laws to encourage vice and wickedness, as to allow its government thus to propagate them. A government cannot need these things. If it does it is a
faction.

faction. These vehicles of poison make men of the same country, the same village, and the same house, enemies to each other. Father against son, and mother against daughter. They make men champions for war, tyranny, and bloodshed; and cause them to sacrifice the dearest interest of their country, and the lives of their fellow creatures, to a damnable, and desperate gang of about a dozen depredators, who live and fatten by the miseries of mankind.

Can any uncorrupt, and unbiassed man, be an advocate for these things? I repeat it; and add, that no virtuous government *would*, nor any free nation *ought*, to tolerate these things.

This is a terrible example, that the best things in the hands of vicious men can be made subservient to the most wicked purposes, since the ingenious and noble art of PRINTING is allowed to be converted to the most horrid end, that of setting mankind to butcher one another;—making Reason bring forth Discord—Peace produce Strife—one Nation destroy another, and keep the inhabitants of the same land at perpetual variance, when Interest, Humanity, and Reason, call them into union.

This evil could not happen, in a national sense, were the government on a right foundation; but having an interest to support opposite to the good of the people, fraud and imposture become necessary, and the circulation of lies, division and strife, the chief end for which court news-papers are established. Nor does it weaken the force of these reflections, that writings of a different tendency in part counteract this poison. Some peoples prejudices are too powerful for their reason, and their inclinations more prone to error and vice, than to virtue and a rational way of thinking; and to countenance the stupidity of such peoples opinions is to confirm them in their folly, and by blinding their understanding, draw them into an opposite interest, and make them enemies to the liberties of their country.

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The business of Government, rightly constituted, is, to *execute* the laws, *not to make them*, as in fact ours does, and to act in obedience to the sense of the People. But our government is commonly in opposition to it. The progress of the American war, the lying and artful commencement of the present war, the invasion and subversion of the dearest rights of the People, in fact by an armed force ; (for London and its environs are full of troops, ready to be called out on the slightest pretext) sufficiently prove the truth of these assertions. —The bills, now forcing their way through a corrupt Senate, are the most astonishing assumption of power ; a proof of the most arbitrary and despotic government that ever was attempted among a people that pretended to *constitutional* Freedom. PAINE was certainly right. If a Government can do this, there can be no Constitution—the very name is a joke, or, more properly, an insult.

A nation that had a proper regard for its liberties would not suffer its government to make laws. It is irrational.—It is the most preposterous absurdity.—Its administration ought not even to have a seat in a house of legislation. Its function is altogether executive, *and ought to be confined to that*.—When the government in 1716, or the parliament at its command, which is the same thing, repealed the triennial act, and passed the septennial one, the nation lost the only corner-stone of its constitution, and the government took it up, and rendered its building impregnable. How ignorant and inattentive must a nation be to *suffer* this ! Since that period the parliament has been the servant of the crown, and not of the public. 'Tis to this circumstance that we must ascribe all the bloody and unnecessary wars that we have been engaged in. To this alone it is owing, that we are now sinking under the intolerable burthen of four hundred millions of debt, the price of our criminal torpitude, and neglect of Public Liberty ! The nation now feels its loss, and its sufferings, and
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is justly in a state of the greatest alarm and despondency, while the government is pushing on and fortifying its encroachments, repealing the bill of rights, and preparing to defend its acquisitions and pretensions at the point of the sword.

This is not idle declamation. This statement, and these reflections are not carried beyond the Truth; but are "a fair history (to borrow the Minister's cant phrase) of *existing circumstances*." It is meant to rouse the torpid, and to encourage those that are awake—to watch the surrounding evils, and to face the threatened danger—to draw our constitutional strength to a focus, and point it against those daring assassins, who are levelling their cannon point blank to blow up the Public Liberty!

But I hope they will not succeed. The people are now exercising a constitutional power, that of petitioning, in which, if they persevere, the happiest effects may be expected; but if they relax, we are inevitably undone. Now or never is the time, when so just an occasion offers. The hammer is up, and if the people do not wrest it from the hands of the state auctioneer, our liberties will be knocked down for ever!

There is no hope but from the people's legal exertion, except in the event of a civil war, if they should be driven to it, which is too dreadful to think on. The King is under the guidance of the Ministry; the Peers, from interest, are attached to the Crown; and the majority of the House of Commons is not to be depended upon. It has been made appear, and offered to be proved in evidence, that three hundred and twenty-eight seats in that house are bought and sold, and like stalls in a fair, are private property. This is the so much boasted of English House of Commons, on which it is often said, though I fear but weakly, depends the liberties of the People of England. But from what I have said above, it will appear, that this must be a very frail dependance. That house is chosen by a small pittance of the people, and this, as I have stated

stated above, is mostly a monopoly. The majority of it is almost always with the minister, right or wrong, and it would actually have suffered the minister to go to war with Russia for the contemptible fort of Ocza-kow, if the People had not set their faces against it; for I believe he carried the vote by a majority of somewhere about eighty. What then is to be expected from a House constituted in this manner, and acting on such principles?

Thus does that over-bearing power, *corruption*, sweep every thing before it like a plague. This house, seemingly without the least concern, votes away twenty or thirty millions of the public money every year, some for the use of foreign nations to fight their own battles, and some to fight the minister's own, and may therefore, very justly be defined, to be a ministerial vortex, where the liberties of the people and the wealth of the nation are swallowed up!

These observations are certainly of a very weighty and serious nature; and it is of no use to soften, to palliate, and to cover the sore, for they are certainly true, and founded on public opinion. The public mind is extremely agitated. The wound is deep, and cannot be cured without a reformation of abuses. The crisis draws near. Liberty is bleeding at every pore. She must be supported. She must have a cordial. Her wounds must be healed; and it is clear to me, that none but the Public will, nor none but the Public can, be her Physician. All others are quacks, that mount the stage only for interest, and have very nearly poisoned her already. But to let the figure drop. The object of what I have said, is, to concentrate the public mind; to persuade them to be trifled with no longer, but to insist upon a reform without delay. This is the proper moment, if they will but strenuously persist in their present legal measures. A better opportunity can never offer. The enemy is at issue with them, and now is the time to try the suit.

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